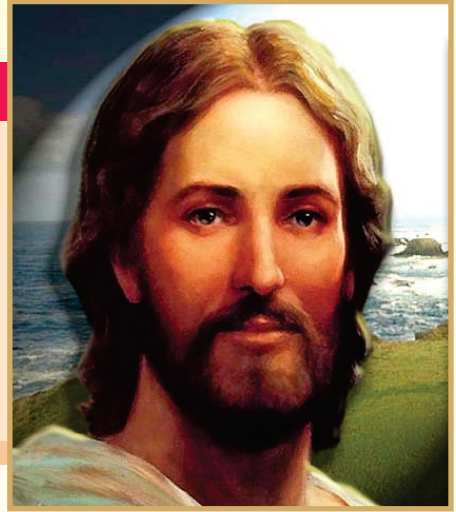


## Chapter 2

# Jesus the Historical Person



There are great men and women who have their place in history and also those who are qualified as creators of history. There is none but Jesus who has ever influenced the history of the world! The birth of Jesus divided that history into B C and A D. No history can be written without indicating the name of Jesus at least implicitly. Jesus has an incomparable position in world history. Every Christian should know the historical facts about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Firstly, the knowledge about Jesus, the historical person will strengthen our faith. Secondly, it helps to clear the doubts of others by entering into dialogue and convince them of the truth about Jesus.

We can find very many evidences to show that Jesus was a historical person. Going through these evidences will help us to understand in depth the historicity of Jesus.

### **Fulfillment of Expectations**

God created man by making them participators of divine life. But man who committed sins by the luring of Satan, lost divine grace. Man became slave to sin. But the loving God chalked out a plan for the salvation of man. That plan was fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

After the fall of the forefathers, God gave them hope of a Saviour by promising them salvation (Gen. 3:15). From the prophesy of Moses who was the leader of Israel, the people of God, we have clear indications about Jesus, the Saviour. About the coming Saviour, Moses told the Israelites, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your, own people; you shall heed such a prophet" (Deut. 18:15). These words of Moses gave hope to the people of Israel of a Saviour. "Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (Is. 7:14). These words of the prophet Isaiah raised in them an expectation of a Saviour. St. Mathew 1: 23 and St. Luke 1: 31 say that the prophesies about Jesus are fulfilled.

The Israelites were expecting the Saviour whom God had promised through the prophets. The God, who in the past spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, spoke to us in the fullness of time through Jesus, His only son (Heb. 1: 1-2). Thus with the advent of Jesus, the expectation of Israelites was fulfilled.

### **Historical Testimonies**

Jesus is from Nazareth he is known as “Jesus the Nazarene. “Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (Jn. 19: 19). We have many reliable sources to study the historicity of Jesus. We shall see some of them.

#### **1. Socrates**

The Greek philosopher, Socrates who lived in 4th century B C Wrote thus, “Wait, expect, the coming of man who knows every thing. He will teach us how to behave before God and men.” This statement of Socrates expresses the expectation for the Saviour of the world. (Ricciotti, *Life of Jesus Christ*)

#### **2. Judaic Tradition**

Jesus, the Nazarene was born of Judaic race. The book “Thalmud” contains Jewish laws and their interpretations. “Midrashim” is a contemporary book. In this book about Jesus it is said, “Nosree (Nazarene) Jesus was accused of misleading the people and therefore he was interrogated and condemned to death.”

#### **3. Flavius Josephus**

The references in the books of the famous historian, Flavius Josephus give clear evidences about the life of Jesus. In A D 94, he wrote 'Jewish Antiquity', a historical book. In that book he explains the history of the Jews and their political situations. There he mentions about Jesus and Christians.

First, he writes very respectfully about John the Baptist and his tragic death. Secondly, he mentions the miserable death of Jacob, the apostle. He qualifies, “Jacob as the brother of Jesus who was called Christ” (Jewish Antiquity XX: 200).

In the next part of the book we find a very detailed discussion. “In those days Jesus, a clever man lived. He was doing truly uncommon things. He was the master of those who gladly receive truth. He attracted towards himself very many Jews and Greeks. When leaders of the people accused him Pilate killed him nailing on the cross. Those who loved him from the beginning did not leave him. In truth, on the third day he rose up and appeared to them as a living person. The inspired prophets had earlier told on similar deeds and other miraculous events. From him, many have received their names as Christians” (Jewish Antiquities XVIII: 63- 64).

#### 4. Roman Writers

Many famous Roman writers have written about Jesus in their writings. A letter written by Pliny the younger, the governor of Asia Minor, to Trajan the Emperor in A.D. 112, is an example for this. Pliny writes that there were many Christians in Bithynia, a territory of his kingdom. He adds that early in the morning they get together and adore Christ as they adore God and sing praise to Him (Epistola, X, 96).

Tacitus is one of the important Roman historians. He writes about Jesus in his historical book 'Annals' as follows: Certain Christ who was killed during the reign of Tiberius the Emperor and while Pontius Pilate was the governor was worshipped by the so called Christians (Annals XV, 44).

#### 5. Apocryphal Books

Apocryphal books speak about Jesus, but they are not officially approved by the Church, as part of the Holy Bible. In those books there are many references to Jesus and events of his time. *Acts of Thomas*, *Gospel of Hebrews*, *Gospel of Nazarene*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Proto Evangelium of Jacob* etc. are all apocryphal books.

#### Jesus in the Gospels

The four Gospels are books written on Jesus. They give us vivid images of Jesus' life and teaching. The descriptions the evangelists give us are significant because they directly saw Him, heard Him and lived with Him. The historical events, persons and places mentioned in the Gospels are great testimonies about the historicity of Jesus.

For example at the time of the birth of Jesus, the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire (LK 2: 1-7). During the reign of Pilate, the Roman Governor, Jesus was condemned to death and crucified and died. It is explained in St. Luke, chapter 23:13-56. Besides, the places where Jesus was born, lived and died exist to this day. The territory consists of these places is called Holy Land. The disciples of Jesus testified to the death of Jesus and were convinced of His resurrection from the dead. Hence, Jesus became the center of their lives. So they preached to the world about Jesus whom they experienced.

Within a very short time the words and teachings of Jesus spread through out the world. For many years, the Gospel message was spread through preaching. Gradually the Gospel was spread through writings. Four Gospels written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are mutually complementary.

St. Luke begins the Gospel thus, "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that I have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to

us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent, Theophilus," (Lk. 1: 1-3). These words of St. Luke the Evangelist clearly show that a narration of the events fulfilled in Jesus is written in the Gospels.

The words of St. John confirm this fact, "New Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God. and that through believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:30-31). From this, we can understand that the evangelist has written only those important facts that have taken place. The apostle, St. John the evangelist again testifies thus, "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things, and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true" (Jn. 21: 24). The contents of the Gospels are based on historical facts. Those who seek truth can not deny the historicity of Christ, the son of God, whom we find in the Gospels.

### **Early Church's Confession of Faith**

The life of the early Christian community is another strong proof to show that Christ was a historical person. A new community whose members believed in Jesus crucified and risen from the dead began to flourish immediately. Already in the first century they were called Christians. It was in Antioch that for the first time believers in Christ were called Christians (Acts 11: 26).

The faithful believed the personal testimonies given by St. Peter, the head of the Apostles and St. Stephen, the martyr. Saul who was zealously persecuting Christians became Paul, a zealous missionary for Christ. His conversion increased the faith of the early church. They proclaimed Jesus and His activities. The number of the faithful increased daily. The proclamation of faith of the early Christians is a strong proof for the historicity of Jesus.

The early church continuously spread all over the world. This presence of the Christians is a great testimony of the historicity of Jesus.

Truthful historians cannot deny the historicity of Jesus. The life of Jesus, the Son of the living God is the source of inspiration to the human race. Jesus who was born of Mary of Nazareth, grew up under the care of Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. At the age of 30, he received baptism from John the Baptist. He preached the Gospel in Judea and the neighbouring places and worked miracles. Jesus was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate and was crucified at Calvary and was buried. On the third day he rose from the dead. The life of Jesus to this day gives hope and encouragement to millions of people.

All those who tried to deface the name of Jesus, went into oblivion in the course of history. But Jesus still lives transcending the history. The life and message of Jesus, the Nazarene, the Saviour of the world for ever remains as an inspiration for all of us.

### **I. Let us discuss**

1. What evidences can you give to prove the historicity of Jesus?
2. "Jesus is the fulfillment of all prophecies." Explain.

### **II. Let us find out the Answers**

1. How could the historical knowledge about Jesus Christ help us?
2. What did Socrates say about Jesus who was expected to be born as Savior of the world?
3. What is the name which indicates the historicity of Jesus?
4. Why do you say that the saving events which are reported in the Gospels are fulfilled in Jesus? How far they testify to the historicity of Jesus?
5. The profession of faith of the early church community is a strong proof for the historicity of Jesus. Explain?

### **III. Activity**

Collect the sayings of the historians and great men about Jesus and share them in the class.

### **IV. Let us Read and Reflect**

Acts of the Apostles 5:21-39.